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Food and Home Notes

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION WASHINGTON, D. C.

33RD YEAR

September 13, 1976

No. 37

— UNDERSTANDING FOOD COSTS

...AND THE FRESH WINTER VEGETABLES

Florida and Mexico are the two major regular suppliers of fresh vegetables to U.S. markets in winter, ac-

cording to the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Of course, minor amounts are supplied by California, Texas, several Caribbean and Central American countries. But -- producers in Mexico and Florida are the competitors in the market-place. Supply increases in one area affect prices and net returns to producers in the other area.

Traditionally, lower wages for workers in Mexico have always made an important difference in ultimate consumer prices. However, with the current tariff on tomatoes from Mexico, there is a narrowing margin.

Mexico has a climatic advantage during the midwinter months in the production of bell peppers...But, not during the early and late parts of the season. Thus, Florida has the dominant position during that period. And, if wages continue to increase, the peak period (mid-winter) for Mexican markets will also be adversely affected.

The eggplant and cucumber production doesn't show any clear cost advantage for Mexico over Florida. But, with strawberry production there is a cost advantage for Mexico now...However, Mexico has a tight self-imposed acreage and quality control which will probably make any future expansion in Mexico's strawberry production unlikely.

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...in Virginia

May 1931

— Extension Service home demonstration leaders give a demonstration on freezing desserts.



...in Milford, Delaware

April 1919

— Extension Service demonstration on egg grading and packaging.
U.S. Department of Agriculture/Food and Home Notes Bicentennial File.

MOLD - BOTULISM — AND TOMATOES

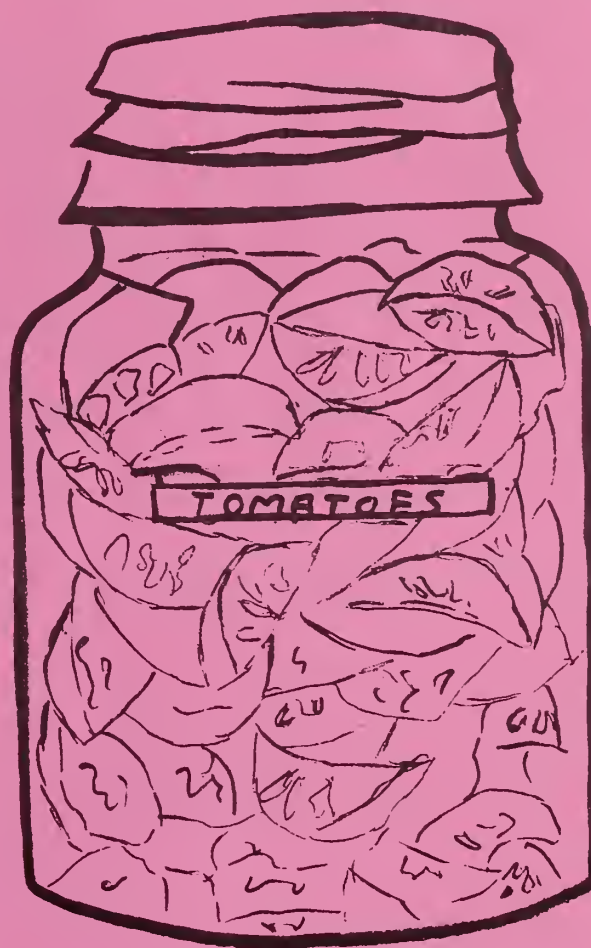
Ordinary looking mold on your home-canned tomatoes may indicate a more serious problem than you realize -- It could mean the presence of a deadly problem, in fact, botulism.

Botulism bacteria growing in the presence of molds may be the explanation for those rare, but serious cases of botulism poisoning that have occurred in people who have eaten home-canned, high acid foods (such as tomatoes and other

fruits), according to microbiologists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Normally, the acid in these foods prevents the growth of the botulism bacteria. However, molds growing on the surface of home-canned high acid foods, such as tomatoes, can reduce the acidity to the point where *C. botulinum* can grow and produce toxin. Removal of the mold does NOT make the rest of the product safe to eat. Why? Because the toxins produced by the bacteria can diffuse throughout the product -- and, remember, only a minute amount of the poison can make a person fatally ill.

Agricultural Research Microbiologist Charles Huhtanen of USDA's Eastern Regional Research Center has studied the relationship of botulism to mold growth. He has inoculated test tubes of tomato juice with botulism spores, and tested 11 cultures. The spores did NOT germinate or produce toxin during a 60 day incubation period.



(con't page 4)

MOLD - BOTULISM (CON'T)

However, when Mr. Huhtanen innoculated the tomato juice with mold spores, C. botulism began to grow and produce toxin 4 days after mold formed a covering, or mat, across the top of the tomato juice...but, it did not change the appearance or the odor of the tomato juice. However, gas bubbles were visible in the samples and tended to raise the mold mat off the surface of the juice. Mr. Huhtanen found that these molds have the ability to change the pH (a measure of acidity)—therein, lies the problem.

Molds are likely to grow on improperly processed acid products when jar lids are not properly sealed. Molds require oxygen to grow. Consumers should NEVER eat -- or taste -- home canned products which show any evidence of spoilage, cloudiness, odor, gas bubbles, or food that comes from containers which are improperly sealed...or ...show ANY signs of damage. Consumers should dispose of the entire jar—contents and container—if there is any question of the above items.

* * * * *

....FRESH PEARS — AVAILABLE NOW

More than 545,000 tons of fresh Bartlett pears from the Pacific coast are moving into the market place according to USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. Harvest is underway in Oregon and Washington with an estimated total of 200,000 tons to be added to a very large crop already harvested in California.

Due to the cannery strike at the beginning of the harvesting period, more pears than usual were marketed as fresh fruit this year. By mid-August, more than 50 percent of the pear crop was shipped fresh in contrast to the usual 25 percent.

FOOD and HOME NOTES--- a weekly newsletter directed to the mass media outlets is published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Communication, Washington, D.C. 20250--Editor: Shirley Wagener-202-447-5898.
